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ABSTRACT

In 1995, a questionnaire was sent to Tennessee public and academic libraries with book collections of more than 5,000 volumes. The response rate was 48% and the sample included 44 public, 23 four-year academic and 7 community college libraries. Forty-three (56%) of these libraries collect local government publications. While, the earliest collection began in 1890, most started in the 1980's and the 1990's. Collections are typically small--less than 100 items. Municipal codes, annual reports, financial reports, and maps are most likely to be collected. Nearly all libraries with local government collections provide reference and photo duplication service but few will lend these items. Acquisition is the most troublesome aspect of collection development. The two most common reasons for failing to collect local government materials were little local demand and the available of other nearby collections. (AEF)

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Local Government Publications in Tennessee Academic and Public Libraries

by

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

Abstract

In 1995, a questionnaire was sent to Tennessee public and academic libraries with collections of more than 5,000 volumes. The response rate was 48% and the sample included 44 public, 23 four-year academic and seven community college libraries. Forty-three or 56 percent of these libraries collect local government publications. While the earliest collection began in 1890, most started in the 1980s and the 1990s. Collections are typically small--less than 100 items. Municipal codes, annual reports, financial reports, and maps are most likely to be collected. Nearly all libraries with local government collections provide reference and photo duplication service but few will lend these items. Acquisition is the most troublesome aspect of collection development. The two most common reasons for failing to collect local government materials were little local demand and the availability of other nearby collections.

Introduction and Problem Statement

While local news media does cover local government and politics, it frequently seems that few local residents involve themselves in the solutions to these problems. They may mutter about highway congestion, overcrowded schools, or city and county taxes, but they are often not well informed about the nature of local government and the decisions it makes.

As the federal government returns responsibility for a variety of governmental functions and responsibilities to the state, county and city government will face new challenges. Welfare is a good example. Many cities and counties will need to find solutions for local residents who will no longer receive federal assistance.

State government also faces financial challenges. It is likely that many state governments will provide fewer services and less financial assistance for local residents and local government. Local government is the end of the line for government downsizing initiatives.

Many of the problems that concern voters are local ones like crime, education, transportation and the environment. The "New Federalism" emphasizes government that is close to the governed. Local government offers more opportunities for citizen participation than state or federal government. Citizens can attend meetings and voice their feelings. They may encounter government employees and officials in the community and know them personally. Often, citizens can directly influence the course of governmental action in direct and immediate ways. It is difficult, however, to influence government if information about policies, procedures, and actions is little known or difficult to obtain. For this decentralization of government responsibility to be successful, local government must accept a greater responsibility for informing its citizens. Libraries could serve a pivotal role in that task.

Although the availability of federal government information has decreased over time, and the move to digital format creates problems for many users, information about federal government initiatives is widely available. A comprehensive depository library system provides substantial collections of useful material with trained, helpful staff in many academic and public libraries. In contrast, it is unusual to find such collections for local government information.

Castonguay (1987: 175) found little or no growth in the number of public libraries having official local government depository status. When available, such collections are small and available library staff may not be familiar with them. In the past, several large metropolitan public libraries had comprehensive municipal reference collections with special library services. Today, many of these fine collections are no more, the result of downsizing and limited resources.

Local government collections are difficult to develop and maintain. Identifying all of the different government agencies that serve a town or county may be a problem (Durrance and Preston, 1988:118). As Castonguay notes (1987:168), "acquisition of local publications has long been hindered by the informal and often irregular manner in which these documents are produced, printed, announced, and distributed. Poor bibliographic control accompanies difficult acquisition problems." This is likely to be even more so as local government information appears only in a digital format on agency WWW pages.

If Tennessee residents want or need local government information, will they find collections and services in their local public or academic library? How has the provision of local government collections and services in Tennessee changed since 1975 when a similar study (Robinson, 1976) was conducted? The purpose of this research is to answer these questions.

Literature Review

There is little literature on local government information collections in academic or public libraries. The available literature falls into three categories: (1) pleas for more and better collections and services, (2) discussion of tools and techniques useful in finding local government information, and (3) surveys of local government collections, usually in public libraries.

Durrance (Durrance, 1985; Durrance, 1988; Durrance and Preston, 1988) has been the major voice pleading for more emphasis on local government collections and services in public libraries. The large number of local government agencies and the poor coordination between them is mentioned as a particular problem

(1988:156). She concludes (Durrance and Preston, 1988:108-109) that environmental, land use, services, quality of life, and governance issues are of particular concern. She, as do others, distinguishes between the information needs of citizens and those of governmental officials. Her 1985 paper provides a good introduction to a variety of initiatives taken through the mid-1980s to "span the local government information gap." Cohen (1985) notes that a library that is visibly useful in providing local government and citizens with information needed to solve problems is likely to have less difficulty in securing financial resources. Too, working with local government officials to obtain information resources provides a good opportunity to inform them about library collections and services.

Tools and techniques would include creating an on-line database for metropolitan government. Archibeque (1989) describes how the Pikes Peak Library District did this. Again, he notes the large number of local government agencies, many of which are invisible. Cheeseman (1994) shows how useful it is to interview local government managers, asking them to review the kinds of questions they receive from community members and the resources used to respond to these questions. Cohen (1986) provides a good overview of the problems, including political ones, of providing information to local government officials, especially part-time ones.

Castonguay (1987) provides an excellent overview of the survey literature done through the mid-1980s. The major findings of these studies will not be repeated here. He also reports on his study of local government information collections in academic and public libraries in four countries. His sample of 138 libraries included 91 (about 66%) from the United States. He found (174) that 41% of the university libraries and 60% of the public ones maintained local government collections. Compared to earlier studies (174), Iowa (61%), Chicago (58%), and

Illinois (50%), these findings are quite similar. Durrance (1988) examined public libraries that were active providers of local government information. She found that the largest number of requests (33%) was for zoning and planning information, followed by financial (15%), environmental (13%), directory (12%), statistical (11%), historical (11%), and regulatory information (10%). She emphasizes (165) that librarians know little about the present and potential users of local government information. Renton, examining use of government publications at the University of California at Irvine, found that local publications were heavily used, perhaps because local government and politics are becoming much more important (367-8). She suggests that academic libraries expand their local government collections, especially where the curriculum encourages field work in the local community.

Methodology

In June 1995, questionnaires were sent to 162 Tennessee academic and public library systems with book collections of 5,000 or more volumes according to the *American Library Directory*. Libraries listed without a holdings statement were not included. Regional libraries were also excluded. The response rate was about 48 percent with 77 libraries responding. Robinson (1980: 9) did a similar study of state government publications in Tennessee and the response rate was 52 percent.

Questionnaire responses were coded into a data file and analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences. The Chi Square test was used to judge significance and Cramer's V was used to test relationship strengths.

Findings

Type of Library

Most responding libraries were public (44 or 57%), followed by academic (23 or 30 percent), community college (seven or 9 percent) and other (two or 3 percent).

Local Government Collections

Forty-three (56 percent) of the responding libraries collect Tennessee local government material while 34 libraries (44 percent) did not. Fifty-two percent of the public libraries, 43 percent of the community college libraries, and 30 percent of the academic libraries collect local government material. This contrasts with the 1976 study where 34 percent of the responding public libraries and 29 percent of the academic libraries had local government publications (Robinson, 1976, 123). Robinson's study of Tennessee state publications (1980:9) found that 25 percent (18) of the public libraries and 50 percent (13) of the academic libraries collected Tennessee state material.

When Established

The earliest local government document collection began in 1890 with the next earliest beginning in 1925. More local government collections were begun in the 1980s (6) and in the 1990s (10) than at any other time. Older collections were more likely to collect capital improvement plans, local government proceedings, and planning agency materials. Libraries with more recent collections were more likely to have clipping files on local government.

Local Government Collection Size

Most collections were small with 68 percent (21 libraries) of the collecting libraries holding less than 100 items. Thirteen percent (four libraries) held between 100 and 500 local government items. Nineteen percent (six libraries) held more than 500 items. There is a significant relationship between size and library type (at

the .07 level). Public libraries are most likely to have collections of more than 500 volumes; community colleges are likely to have collections of 100 to 500 items. Academic libraries are likely to have collections of less than 100 items.

Total Collection Size

Collection size was used as a proxy for library size. As expected, larger libraries tended to be academic ones. Smaller libraries were usually public. The mean responding library had a collection of 140,781 volumes while the median was about 50,000. Medium-sized libraries (60,000 - 130,000 volumes) were most likely to hold municipal codes. Medium and the smallest libraries (less than 27,000 volumes) were most likely to hold local government proceedings.

Types of Material Held

Collections of local government material include a variety of types. Truesdell (1992) contains an exhaustive list with helpful definitions of the many types of county government documents. Here, a much more simplified list was used to compare results with previous studies. Table 1 presents more information. (Table 1 about here) Only four categories are found in most local government collections: municipal codes, annual reports, financial reports, and maps. News releases from local government agencies, county ordinances, and building codes are least likely to be found. Community colleges were most likely to collect municipal codes, county ordinances, annual reports, maps, and administrative rules. Academic libraries were most likely to collect municipal codes, maps and planning materials. Public libraries were most likely to collect finance material, municipal codes, annual reports and maps.

Housing

Sixteen libraries (49 percent) placed at least some local government items in the regular collection. Fifteen libraries (50 percent) placed some items in a

special collection. Academic and community college libraries were likely to house local materials in the regular collection. Public libraries were more likely to place them in a special collection. Of those libraries using a special collection, only 16 percent (four libraries) provided access via a catalog. About 44 percent (15 libraries) of those libraries with local government material included them in their public catalog with 6 percent (two libraries) having some items in this catalog.

Services

Libraries holding local government material provide a variety of services. Eighty-two percent (27) provided reference and photo-duplication service. Public libraries were less likely to provide reference service. Only 24 percent (8) made local government material available on interlibrary loan. All the community colleges with local government material lent these materials in contrast to 29 percent of the academic libraries and 9 percent of the public libraries. Of those willing to lend, most had some restrictions. Twenty-six percent (19) maintained a clipping file that included information on local government. In contrast, 56 percent of Illinois public libraries who were active providers of local government information clipped local newspaper articles about the community and 13% indexed the local newspaper (Durrance's, 1988:161). Interestingly, there was no significant difference by type of library. About 29 percent of the community colleges, 26 percent of the academic libraries, and 24 percent of the public libraries maintained clipping files.

Troublesome Aspects

Libraries were asked to identify the most troublesome aspects of developing a local government collection. Acquisition was clearly the most troublesome (57 percent or 24 libraries). Cataloging, classification, and subject heading work came next with 27 percent (10 libraries). Seventeen percent (6 libraries) found selection troublesome. Least troublesome (9 percent each or three libraries each) were

public services and binding, shelving, and weeding. Community college libraries were most likely to find public service troublesome.

Reasons for Not Collecting

The 34 responding libraries that did not collect local government material identified different rationales for their decision. The two most common were little local demand and the availability of other collections that hold this material (63 percent or 27 libraries each). About 25 percent of the non-collecting community college libraries, 50 percent of the academic libraries and 81 percent of the public libraries said that there was little local demand. All of the non-collecting community colleges, 81 percent of the academic libraries, and 48 percent of the public libraries said that other local government information collections were available to their users. Forty-two percent (18 libraries) said that a local government collection was too expensive.

Discussion

The literature suggests that typically, between 50 and 60% of the public libraries in the United States will collect local government information (Castonguay, 1987:174-175). The 34% finding from Robinson's early study was dramatically lower, suggesting that Tennessee was unusual in this regard. The finding that 52 percent of the Tennessee public libraries now collect local government information represents a substantial improvement and brings the state up to the average. However, the state remains below the mean percentage found in mid-western public libraries (where most of the previous research was done). One wonders if there is something about community or library culture in the Mid-West that facilitates such public library interest in local government information. State

Libraries may wish to consider a program to insure that an even larger proportion of public libraries acquire and make local government information available.

Libraries not collecting local government material did so because of little local demand and the availability of other collections that hold this material. One wonders about the validity of the lack of local demand rationale. Clearly, this is a Catch 22 situation. Without a collection, potential users are unlikely to know what is possible and won't ask for collections and services. Do libraries citing this rationale document lack of demand? Given the unique nature of local government collections, it may be difficult to assume that other collections will meet local needs. Even where academic and public libraries are located in the same community, two collections may be needed to meet the quite different needs of students and citizens. At least some librarians may not be that familiar with the contents of the "other" local government collection.

Typically, the local government collection consists of fewer than 500 volumes (Castonguay, 1987:177) . This is true of Tennessee where only six libraries have collections of more than 500 volumes. With relatively few items, local government publication collections may be too small to meet needs. Obviously, much depends on the publication output of local government agencies. The best answer here is designation as an official depository to insure collection adequacy. As more local government information is available via the WWW, library collection size may become much less important. Still, preservation and other access issues will surely arise.

Intellectual and physical access to local government material remains a problem. Whether integration or segregation of local government material is best for the user remains controversial. A special collection may increase access while reducing the need for cataloging and classification. Small collections devoted to the

local community may be self-cataloged and classified, but better intellectual access may be justified by the importance of the material.

Only one responding library (University of Tennessee, Knoxville) held the often praised *Index to Current Urban Documents,* providing intellectual access to material issued by larger local governments. Durrance (1985:105) suggests that the *Index,* with its microfiche collection of documents, is an important source, especially useful for answering queries from government employees and citizen groups about what other local governments have done about a particular problem. However, her 1988 (161) study of Illinois public libraries actively providing information about local government found that none mentioned using the *Index.* Given that finding and the one here, one wonders if this source is really useful or cost-effective for public libraries.

Durrance (1988) found that zoning and housing information was most requested followed by financial, environmental, statistical, historical, and regulatory information. Her categories may not match well with those used in this study, but they provide a useful context. Table 1 suggests that few Tennessee libraries are well-prepared to meet most of these requests. Note that compared to 1976, more Tennessee libraries held municipal codes, zoning material, administrative rules and regulations, financial reports and proceedings. Fewer Tennessee libraries held capital improvement plans and building codes. In 1995, only 32% of Tennessee public and academic libraries with local government collections hold zoning information and only 21 percent hold building codes. However, 56% do hold maps and these may be useful in answering zoning and housing questions. Financial information was the next most requested category in Durrance's study. Sixty-two percent of Tennessee libraries with local government collections hold financial reports. Regulatory information varies in availability. While 53% of the libraries with

local government collections hold municipal codes, only 21% hold county ordinances and 26% hold administrative rules and regulations. Benigo (1988:126) notes that the *Municipal Code* was the most heavily used item in the collection at the Chicago Municipal Reference Library. Public libraries, the logical agency for active provision of local government information to citizens and those involved in government, were most likely to collect finance material, municipal codes, annual reports and maps. If Durrance's active providers are models, Tennessee public libraries need to better develop their collections in zoning/housing and environmental issues.

In 1976, 91 percent of the Tennessee libraries with local government collections provided reference service on them. Nine years later, this percentage had declined to 82 percent. Earlier, 95 percent of these libraries provided photo duplication service on local materials as contrasted with 82 percent in 1995. In 1976, 60 percent of the libraries would lend local government materials via ILL. This fell to 24 percent in 1995. There has been a notable decline in services associated with local government information in Tennessee libraries during the past few years.

Durrance and Preston (1988:116) argue that the local newspaper is the key to capturing information about local government. It is discouraging then that only 26% (compared to 55% in 1976) of the responding Tennessee libraries maintained clipping files. A few public libraries have long indexed the local newspaper. It is easier to do that today with the availability of helpful and relatively inexpensive hardware and software. Such activity that be done regionally, perhaps in cooperation with a development agency or chamber of commerce.

Lack of proper bibliographic control has been frequently mentioned as the major problem in developing local government collections and services. Tennessee

libraries with local government collections agree. Bibliographic control must inevitably begin at home. If the local library does not identify, find, and add local government material to its collection, it is unlikely that any other agency will do so. Surely, this is a responsibility of particular concern for any public library, especially since such material will often be useful later for local history and genealogy.

It is useful to distinguish between the information needs of those who work for government or are elected to official roles and those of the citizen. In Tennessee, the Municipal Technical Advisory Service (MTAS) provides substantial and high-quality information services to those in government. There is a similar agency for Tennessee counties. Other states similar services and their availability may lighten the responsibility of Tennessee libraries to provide information services to government agencies and their employees. Kelly (1995) describes how the Metro Chicago Information Center, a nonprofit research organization not affiliated with a library, produces a database of citations to local and regional government publications that is accessible on a fee basis. Perhaps similar centers could be established in other metropolitan areas, including those in Tennessee

Another appropriate course of action would be for State Libraries to provide a series of continuing education opportunities for both public and academic librarians in how to more effectively provide and promote access to local government information. State Libraries might also take the lead in developing model depository ordinances that might be widely adopted.

Providing access to local government information is a unique social role. No other community institution is likely to do this or do it as well as the library. This is an opportunity to enhance the status and value of the local public library. For academic libraries, it is an opportunity to provide information that links faculty and student research and service to the local community. It would be a tragedy if

librarians failed to take advantage of that opportunity.

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Table 1: Types of Local Government Material Held

Type	Number Holding	Number 1976	Percentage *	Percentage 1976
Municipal Code	18	15	53	79
County Ordinances	7	na	21	na
Building Codes	7	37	21	37
Zoning Ordinances	11	9	32	47
Annual Reports	22	na	65	na
Administrative Rules and Regulations	9	4	26	21
Financial Reports	21	10	62	53
Capital Improvement Plans	8	9	24	47
Proceedings	11	3	32	16
News Releases	4	6	12	26
Maps	19	na	56	na
Other	16	na	49	na

*Here the percentage is based on the number of libraries holding local government material. For example, 53 percent of Tennessee academic and public libraries holding local government material acquire municipal codes.

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